

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 01852

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TAGS: PINT, PEPR, UK, EI
SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: TORY SPOKESMAN ABANDONS
BIPARTISANSHIP

SUMMARY - CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN ON NORTHERN IRELAND,
AIREY NEAVE, TOLD A PARTY AUDIENCE THAT POWER-SHARING
IS NO LONGER AN ATTAINABLE GOAL IN NI, AND SEEMED TO
ENDORSE THE UNIONIST PROGRAM OF ESTABLISHING A MIDDLE
LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT IN THE PROVINCE. NEAVE'S STATEMENT
WAS WIDELY INTERPRETED AS AN EFFECTIVE REPUDIATION OF
THE BIPARTISAN POLICY ON NI. HMG, HOWEVER, IS NOT
CERTAIN THIS IS THE CASE AND IS WITHHOLDING JUDGEMENT
FOR THE MOMENT. WE NOTE THAT THE TORIES SEEM TO BE
SEARCHING FOR ISSUES THAT MIGHT GIVE THEM A POLITICAL
ADVANTAGE OVER CALLAGHAN, AND THAT THIS MIGHT REPRESENT
NEAVE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THAT SEARCH. END SUMMARY

1. AIREY NEAVE, CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN ON NI FEBRUARY 1
TOLD A CONSERVATIVE WOMEN'S CONFERENCE THAT "THANKS TO
THE IRISH GOVERNMENT, A POWER-SHARING ADMINISTRATION IN
NI IS NO LONGER PRACTICAL POLITICS" AND WENT ON TO
CONDEMN IRISH PRIME MINISTER LYNCH'S REPUDIATION OF THE
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1973 SUNNINGDALE AGREEMENT. CONTINUING, HE ADVOCATED
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN
NI, WHICH SEEMED TO SOME OBSERVERS MUCH LIKE THE PLAN
FAVORED BY THE UNIONIST PARTY.

2. PRESS AND OTHER OBSERVERS WERE QUICK TO ASSERT THAT
NEAVE'S STATEMENT REPRESENTED ABANDONMENT OF THE HERE-

TOFORE CAREFULLY NURTURED BIPARTISAN POLICY ON NI, ESPECIALLY SINCE IT FOLLOWED ON THE HEELS OF REPORTS THAT THE CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP HAS DECIDED TO OPPOSE USE OF THE SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (PR) IN THE NI ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY (THE GOVERNMENT'S DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL MAKES AN EXCEPTION FOR NI, SPECIFYING THAT ITS DELEGATES WILL BE ELECTED BY PR WHILE THE REST OF THE UK DELEGATES WILL BE ELECTED BY SIMPLE MAJORITY -- IN NI THE LATTER SYSTEM WOULD PROBABLY PRECLUDE CATHOLIC REPRESENTATION AT STRASBOURG). ACCORDINGLY, THE PRESS INFERRED THAT THE CONSERVATIVES HAD LAUNCHED A CAMPAIGN TO REACH A FORMAL ALLIANCE WITH THE UNIONISTS BEFORE THE NEXT ELECTION. OUR SOURCES AT THE NI OFFICE, HOWEVER, ARE NOT CERTAIN THIS IS THE CASE AND ARE WITHHOLDING COMMENT UNTIL THE SITUATION IS CLARIFIED. THEY OBSERVE -- CORRECTLY -- THAT NEAVE HAS PREVIOUSLY LAUNCHED TRIAL BALLOONS WHICH WERE QUICKLY DEFLATED OR SHOT DOWN, AND THAT THIS ONE MAY NOT HAVE THE APPROVAL OF MRS. THATCHER AND THE SHADOW CABINET. NI OFFICIALS ALSO REPORT THAT NEAVE'S SUBSEQUENT STATEMENTS SUGGEST THAT HE DID NOT INTEND TO SCUTTLE THE BIPARTISAN NI POLICY, THOUGH THEY LEFT LITTLE DOUBT THAT THEY WERE RESENTFUL BECAUSE NEAVE FAILED TO GIVE THEM ADVANCE WARNING OF HIS SPEECH AND BELIEVED HIS REMARKS WERE UNHELPFUL.

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3. COMMENT: WE ARE INCLINED TO ACCEPT NIO ASSESSMENT, BUT WITH A CAVEAT. THE TORIES HAVE RECENTLY BEEN SEEKING TO IDENTIFY ISSUES THAT MIGHT ALLOW THEM TO REGAIN THE POLITICAL ADVANTAGE FROM CALLAGHAN. EVENTS OF THE NEXT FEW DAYS SHOULD REVEAL WHETHER NEAVE'S BALLOON WAS LAUNCHED WITH THE PARTY'S BLESSING AND WHETHER THERE MIGHT BE ANY ELECTORAL ADVANTAGE TO BE GAINED ON THIS ISSUE. IN REGARD TO THE LATTER, WE THINK NOT, THOUGH IT COULD UNDERMINE THE UNIONISTS' CURRENT TENDENCY TO TILT TOWARD THE GOVERNMENT.

BREWSTER

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